



ERIC WHITACRE'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL

CHAPTERS 3 – 5: THE GOLDEN BRICK

A single idea that unifies the entire work

Student Guide – Curiosity Edition



Introduction

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will help you gain some insight into Eric's approach for creating musical themes and gestures by exploring Golden Bricks. You will explore even more ideas that may help you listen to all music more insightfully. In Chapter 3, Eric discusses his concept of the Golden Brick – a single idea that unifies the entire work. The Golden Brick could be a chord or a few notes that express the “big idea” that shapes the work. He demonstrates this through two works, *Lux Aurumque* (Light and Gold) for mixed choir a cappella and *Deep Field*, for orchestra (or wind band), choir and smartphones. Works referenced

in this video:

- *Lux Aurumque*: <https://youtu.be/e6HVCqQStRE>
- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>

In Chapter 4, Eric continues his discussion of the themes generated by the Golden Brick, specifically. He demonstrates this through three of his works: *Cloudburst*, *Deep Field*, and *Sleep*, in which he shows how the pitches which make up the Golden Brick chords resonate with melody and “sing with possibility.” The shimmering tones of the Golden Brick theme create the melodic and harmonic elements that allow the full work to emerge clearly in unity and inevitability. Works referenced in this video:

- *Cloudburst*: <https://youtu.be/BQOMypd3JmM>
- *Deep Field*: <https://youtu.be/yDiD8F9ItX0>
- *Sleep*: <https://youtu.be/Yw5gupbe9E0>

In Chapter 5, Eric demonstrates further how the Golden Brick informs and shapes the work, first in *Equus*, where the number “5” guides the composer in various ways. In *The Sacred Veil*, the Golden Brick is the tone “middle C,” representing the “veil,” or ribbon of energy dividing life and death. In *Deep Field*, the Golden Brick chord is used to demonstrate the “in focus/out of focus” quality of the music. Through these gestures, the composer reduces some of the seeming randomness of decision making, since composition is based on the Golden Brick. And, audiences may sense the structure of the work, even if they are not aware of the musical specifics. Works referenced in this video:

- *Equus*: <https://youtu.be/EiiJxpJuCsA>
- *The Sacred Veil*: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_k-FSrcD6Jf5jSBlizn8t3mQwB90V7ANIM

Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Louis Kahn
The Golden Brick
A Musical Hook
Lux Aurumque
Cloudburst
Sleep
Deep Field
Equus

Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Can images be adequately expressed in other ways such as through sound, words, or feelings? Why, or why not? Explain your thinking.

A Golden Brick represents a set of musical ideas that can unify a composition. What are some other unifying ideas, techniques, or principles found in visual art, theater, and dance?

When architect Louis Kahn said “Even a brick wants to be something. It aspires. Even a common, ordinary brick... wants to be something more than it is”, what do you think he was trying to say? What does that quote mean to you?

Discover the Golden Brick

1. Listen to Whitacre’s *Lux Aurumque* and see if you can hear the Golden Brick ideas throughout the composition. Do you feel like it affects your breathing as you listen in the way that Eric described in the video? What else do you think of while you are listening? Explain.

Listen: <https://youtu.be/e6HVCqQStRE>

2. Listen a second time to *Lux Aurumque* and allow yourself to breathe to the phrase structure of the piece...in and out...as you listen. Do you notice a difference in how you feel from the start to the finish when you breathe consciously with the music? Explain your thoughts.

3. Listen to Whitacre’s *Cloudburst* and see if you can hear his Golden Brick ideas throughout the composition. Do you get the sense of an approaching rainstorm as you listen? Describe your thoughts in the climatic (loud) sections toward the end of the piece. What else do you think of while you are listening?

Listen: <https://youtu.be/BQOMypd3JmM>

4. When people describe popular music, they sometimes use the term “musical hook.” A “hook” is a musical idea, often a short riff, passage, or phrase, that is used in popular music to make a song appealing and to “catch the ear of the listener.” Find a song or piece of music that you already know and enjoy and see if you can describe the unifying elements or “hooks” in the song.

Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear musical hooks and Golden Bricks in music? Why or why not, in your opinion? Describe your thinking. What might you do to hear them better?

When you think about music, movies, and even sporting events would you say that there are many unifying elements present in each? Describe some of these repeating or unifying elements? Why are these unifying elements important in your opinion?

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.
